

## **The Current Issues of Indonesian EFL Students' Writing Skills: Ability, Problem, and Reason in Writing Comparison and Contrast Essay**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to investigate issues of Indonesian EFL students' writing skills, covering ability, problem and reason why they got problems in writing comparison and contrast essay. The convergent parallel of mixed methods was used to explore these issues by involving 52 EFL students of IAIN Samarinda who enrolled the academic essay writing course. The three research instruments; essay writing test, open-ended questionnaire and interview were used in the data collection. The findings of this study revealed that the Indonesian EFL students' writing ability was good that categorized with the mean score 77.83. However, some of them encounter problems in writing aspects including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Their reasons in experiencing these problems are not only limited knowledge of writing aspects and comparison and contrast essay itself, but also they had own personal reasons; lack of writing practice, writing dislike, writing anxiety, negative writing perception, low writing motivation, insufficient time given in writing test, and also inadequate teaching writing process taught by their lecturers. Indeed, the teaching writing improvement that involved EFL students and lecturers should be well-integrated

in order to alleviate the students' essay writing problems related to their reasons and to improve their writing ability. Factors caused the writing difficulties will be discussed further and some suggestions will be given on this research.

**Keywords:** Writing Issues, Essay Writing Skill, Comparison and Contrast Essay, Ability, Problem, and Reason in Writing

## A. Introduction

Writing is one of productive English skills that should be masterly skilled by English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesia for written communication and academic writing purposes, such as; letters, essays, papers, articles, journals, project reports, theses, etc. It asserted that writing has a vital role in language production that is used for global mediation of knowledge (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016). However, it not only uses for interactions and transactions, but also it provides the chances to study abroad for students (Yi, 2009). However, the EFL students faced the writing problems that affected on their writing ability.

Some studies had conducted to investigate the Indonesian EFL students' problems in writing. Rahmatunisa (2014) investigated the Indonesian EFL learners' problems in writing argumentative essay. This study revealed that the EFL students had problems in terms of linguistics, cognitive, and psychological. Ariyanti & Fitriana (2017) reported that Indonesian EFL university students were trouble in using grammar, cohesion, coherence, paragraph organization, diction, and spelling errors in essay writing. Additionally, Hasan & Marzuki (2017) analyzed the Indonesian EFL students' ability in writing by asking the students to do writing task in determined time. Their findings showed that the grammatical problems covering using plural forms, articles, verbs forms, clauses, passive voice and preposition existed on the students' writing.

Other contexts of EFL students' writing problems had also established. Ahmed (2010) reported the Egyptian students encountered the problems of cohesion and coherence in their essay writing. Al-Jaro, Al-Quiadhi, & Ramadhan (2016) pointed out that Yemen EFL students perceived the mistakes and errors in writing skills because of traditional methods and techniques employed by writing instructors in teaching writing at Sana'a University. Belkhir & Benyelles (2017) exposed the EFL learners' essay writing difficulties and sources at Tlemcen University. Their study found that the students met difficulties in both coherence and cohesion due to the lack of reading, first language transfer and low writing practice. Nasser (2019) diagnosed the Iraqi EFL students' writing composition difficulties and revealed that the students' errors were concerned on using grammar, punctuation, spelling, and handwriting.

Concerning the issue of writing problem above, it indeed claimed that writing is the hardest skill for students, since it does not only generate the ideas but also these ideas could be translated into perceived-text (Richards & Renandya, 2002), and requires to combine the competencies of neurological, physical, cognitive, and affective (Murray & Moore, 2006). It identified the two factors why the EFL students faced the trouble in writing; internal and external factors, in which internal factor dealt with their low English writing proficiency, meanwhile external factor referred to their inadequate quality in studying the writing skills (Husin & Nurbayani, 2017). As a result, their writing ability was unsatisfied.

Some studies had conducted to investigate the writing ability of EFL university students in Indonesia. Eliwarti & Maarof (2014) who conducted their study in Pekanbaru, Riau, reported that the university students' ability in essay writing was low because of teaching essay writing, writing material, complexity of writing skill and writing strategy employed by lecturer and students in the classroom. Then, in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Aunurrahman, Hamied & Emilia (2016) pointed out that the EFL students' writing control related to the structures and linguistic features in argumentative essay writing was still limited, especially in developing of critical thinking. Ariyanti & Fitriana (2017) did their study in private university in Samarinda- East Kalimantan, asserted the quality of EFL students' essay writing ability was poor categorized. In short, the finding of these studies claimed that the Indonesian EFL university students' essay writing ability showed unsatisfied writing performance.

Concerning the research findings above, there was also difference of research findings concerning the Indonesian EFL students' essay writing. Sanu (2016) and Husin & Nurbayani (2017) who investigated the Indonesian EFL students' writing ability at IAIN Samarinda, East Kalimantan and reported that their academic paper writing was good quality (Husin & Nurbayani, 2017) and also their English narrative paragraph writing (Sanu, 2016). Rasyidah & Antoni (2014) organized their study in Riau and similarly noted the Indonesian EFL learners had satisfied proficiency in critical essay writing. Next, Cahyono, Mukminatien, & Amrina (2016) studied the EFL students' argumentative essay writing at Universitas Negeri Malang- East Java and revealed that the students' proficiency in writing was fairly good at the intermediate level. Finally, Irwan, Syafei, & Marlina (2018) involved the EFL students of Universitas Negeri Padang, West Sumatra and highlighted that the Indonesian EFL students' writing ability of analytical exposition was in proficient level. Consequently, it could be stated that the university EFL students' essay writing ability in Indonesian was satisfied.

Seeing the differences research findings concerning the Indonesian EFL students' essay writing performance i.e. studies from Eliwarti & Maarof (2014); Aunurrahman, Hamied & Emilia (2016); and Ariyanti & Fitriana, (2017), they revealed low writing ability. Meanwhile, the studies from Rasyidah & Antoni (2014); Cahyono et al. (2016); Sanu (2016); Husin & Nurbayani (2017); and Irwan et al. (2018) highlighted high writing ability, indeed it could be said that the essay writing ability of EFL students in Indonesia is still debatable issues in research communities. Consequently, their ability in writing the essays can be investigated in any time, because essay is considered to be an academic writing that

has become a principle issue in Indonesian universities, since students are required to write in English effectively (Fatimah & Masduqi, 2017). Therefore, the ability in writing is claimed as the key factor to get successful in academic writing that needs academic writing practices (Husin & Nurbayani, 2017). Sulisworo, Rahayu, & Akhsan (2016) argued that the ability or skill in writing is the indicator of successful of learning process for students in their education and future. The present study investigated the ability, problem, and reason why the Indonesian EFL students are still difficult to organize essay especially in writing comparison and contrast essay.

## **B. Literature Review**

### **1. Essentials of Paragraph Writing**

Paragraph is the basic element of writing composition, containing a number of sentences or related statements that work together to develop one main idea (Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002; Brandon & Brandon, 2011; and Connelly, 2013). The sentences in a paragraph are five to ten sentences and/or six to twelve sentences; however the length and short of sentences are depending on the writing topic (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005 and Zemach & Islam, 2006). The first sentence of a paragraph is usually indented (move in) in a few spaces (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005).

Moreover, it is agreed that paragraph organization is made up into three structural elements; topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence (Oshima & Hogue, 200) and Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002; Brandon & Brandon, 2011; and Connelly, 2013). Topic sentence discusses main idea of the paragraph and has two terms; a topic itself and a key word or controlling idea. The key word or controlling idea is used to limit the topic and conveyed the point that the writer wants to make the thought of the topic. Next, supporting sentences are used to develop the topic sentence by providing explanation, reason, example, fact, statistic, detail, and quotation that can be arranged in a logical and cohesive manner. Lastly, concluding sentence is composed to signal the end of the paragraph and states readers with valuable-points to be remembered. Moreover, a paragraph should be unity and coherence. Unity refers to the every supporting sentence are related with others and discuss only one main idea; meanwhile coherence includes logically and smoothly arrangement of ideas and transition signal use.

Furthermore, Yule (2010) stated that writing presents the symbolic language through using the signs of graphic that can be acquired and learned through sustained conscious effort. It is the thinking processes at inventing, expressing, and arranging the ideas into good writing of statements and paragraphs (Nunan, 2003). It further needs well-arrangements of mechanical components, including handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and also the organization of sentences, paragraphs, and texts (Harmer, 2004). Furthermore, writing can be elucidated as the production of the written word that results in a text, in which the produced text must be read and comprehended for communication purpose (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2002). McMahan et al. (2016) claimed the purposes of writing are to express feeling, entertaining, informing, and persuading readers. Indeed, the messages should be written clearly and comprehensively. In educational context, writing is needed in order to fulfill the varieties of academic situations, such in composition classes

and for essay tests, papers, laboratory reports, and project reports writing (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002). Additionally, Bailey (2011) added academic writing is not only composed to report and synthesize a research subject, but also to write and answer the discussed-questions based on writer's interest and point of view.

Moreover, writing could be categorized as a skill, since it involves producing language rather than receiving the language (Spratt & William, 2005). In this case, Langan (2010) illustrated this writing skill like driving, typing, cooking, dancing, and other skills that can be learned through the involvement of action and practice. Additionally, it needs a process of resulting a satisfied writing (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). They further argued that writing is ongoing creative actions, involving four steps of acts; prewriting, organizing, drafting, and polishing such as revising and editing (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Prewriting is a way to get ideas that can be done through brainstorming, freewriting, listing, clustering, and questioning (Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002; Langan, 2010; and Connelly, 2013). Next, organizing is the further step in arranging the ideas found in the prewriting process result that can be done in the forms of outlining and making diagram. Outlining refers to the writer makes an outline of a topic by deciding the main idea and its supporting ideas, meanwhile tree diagram deals with the writer starts writing with the main idea then makes branches to point the supporting ideas. Then, drafting deals with the writer writes the first a rough draft using an outlining and/or diagram as a guide without worrying about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Revising is the process of rewriting and reorganizing the ideas that have already written in the previous draft in order to make it stronger, consisting of correcting spelling mistakes, adding missing information, and checking unity, coherence, and logical organization and writing content; in which writer might be changed, rearranged, added or deleted the ideas until getting clearly, effectively and interestingly ideas. Finally, editing is the process of editing a final draft that involves checking the small unit of writing, such as grammar, spelling, mechanics, and other errors such as eliminating wordy phrases and rewriting confusing or weak sentences, until getting the satisfied writing result.

## **2. Comparison and Contrast Essay**

Essay is a piece of paper writing that contains some paragraphs, discussing a topic or an issue (Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Zemach & Rumisek, 2005; and Langan, 2010). Similarly, Connelly (2013) claimed an essay is a total of related paragraphs that support a thesis. This author classified the types of essays; formal and informal essay. In formal essay, it is aimed to inform readers about an idea and persuade them to accept point of view; meanwhile, the informal essay is to share a writer's personal feelings, thoughts, or experiences. Both of them should have a clear goal, specific address, subject, and logically arrangement of supporting details (Connelly, 2013).

In essay organization, the scholars i.e. Oshima & Hogue (2007); Boardman & Frydenberg (2002); Zemach & Rumisek (2005); Langan (2010); and Connelly (2013) agreed that there are basically three structures of essay; introductory paragraph, body paragraph, and conclusion paragraph. They further stated that in introductory paragraph, it is written in order to introduce and stimulate readers' interest and essay topic. Here, it

pervades general statements and a thesis statement. The general statements write the background information of the topic that can be organized starting from general idea into specific idea; while a thesis statement is to introduce and state the main ideas of the essay that can be listed of its subdivisions of the topic or subtopics systematically. A thesis statement further presents the positions of the writer and serves as essay mission statement that is composed in a single sentence and helps to the topic limitation. Then, in the body paragraph, it has one or more paragraphs; where each of paragraph states a topic sentence, supporting sentences and sometimes concluding sentence. The detail fact, observation, personal experience, statistic and quotation can be used to support the thesis statement. The last, conclusion paragraph, it is written to signal the end of essay, summarize the main points, and leave the final thoughts of writer to readers.

Particularly to Comparison and contrast essay, it is an essay that shows similarities and dissimilarities between subjects (Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002; Zemach & Rumisek, 2005; Langan, 2010; Brandon & Brandon, 2011; and Connelly 2013) such as people, places, things, ideas (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002). In comparison, it organized and developed the points of similarity; and in contrast, it explored the points of dissimilarities. In addition, in the organization, comparison and contrast essay can be structured into some parts. They are subject by subject and point by point (Connelly, 2013). In subject by subject, it divides the body paragraphs into two sections; the first section introduced the topics and controlling ideas of first subject, followed by second subject. It is simple to organize because the body paragraphs grouped into two parts. In the point by point, it developed a series of comparisons that showed specific similarities and differences for easier reading. It is also useful to demonstrate advantages and disadvantages because each point is presented separately.

### **C. Research Methodology**

The convergent parallel of mixed methods design was used. It converged or merged the quantitative and qualitative data for comprehensively analysis of research problem (Creswell, 2014). It involved 52 students (9 males and 43 females, age 19 to 23 years old) of the fifth semester English students of IAIN Samarinda in 2018/2019 academic year. The three research instruments were utilized; writing test of comparison and contrast essay, open-ended questionnaire and interview in the data collection. The 52 students administered the writing test of selected topic given for 100 minutes in order to result the satisfied essay writing, consisting of at least 20 to 30 sentences covered on the introductory, body, and conclusion paragraphs of essay. They further responded the open-ended questionnaire that aimed to identify their problems and reasons why they experienced the problems in writing comparison and contrast essay. Furthermore, 10 of them were purposively selected as respondents for interview in term of ability levels, i.e. low and high ability in order to crosscheck the EFL students' problems and reasons in composing the comparison and contrast essay.

The Indonesian EFL students' essay writing result was evaluated in terms of writing aspects of comparison and contrast essay, in which they were adapted and developed from writing rubric of Jacobs et al. (1981). It covered content, organization, vocabulary,

grammar, and mechanics. In terms of content, it deals with information of compare and contrast items clearly and relevant to the assigned topic; organization aspect is concerned to the information organized into whole-to-whole, similarities-to-differences, or point-by-point structures by using appropriate transition signals; vocabulary refers to the use of suitable and effective words/idioms/register choice and word form mastery; then grammar covers on effective complex construction of agreements, tenses, numbers, words order function, articles, pronouns and prepositions; finally mechanics (correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing).

The quantitative data were analyzed using the program of SPSS version 22, data statistics covering sum, mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation scores. Similarly, the writing aspects were also used as the indicator of open-ended questionnaire and interview transcript, where their results were analyzed using content analysis. It is applied for analyzing not only published communication forms, but also unpublished writing, such as asking people at producing essays, interview transcript, diary, and verbal protocols (Coolican, 2018). Its procedures of analyzing these qualitative data used the flow model analysis of Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/ verification.

#### **D. Research Findings**

Research findings presented some issues of EFL students writing, such as; EFL students' writing ability, problems and reasons why they faced the problems in writing comparison and contrast essay. The data presented below:

##### **1. EFL Students' Writing Ability of Comparison and Contrast Essay**

The EFL students were asked to compose the comparison and contrast essay that aimed to find out their ability. The result of their writing then was evaluated and scored in terms of five writing aspects. They were content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

From the calculation result of SPSS program version 22, it could be reported:

**Table 1: Data statistics**

<b>N</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
52	4047	<b>77.83</b>	48	92	12.175

The sum score of 52 EFL students was 4047. The mean score was 77.83. The minimum score was 48 and the maximum score was 92, with 12.175 for standard deviation. It showed that the Indonesian EFL students' ability in writing comparison and contrast essay was good categorized (B).

Furthermore, the table 2 displayed the Indonesian EFL students' writing ability in details, as follows:

**Table 2: writing ability description**

Intervals	Qualifications	Number of EFL Students	
		Frequency	Percentage
86 - 100	Excellent (A)	16	30.77%
70 - 85	Good (B)	24	46.15%
60 - 69	Fair (C)	6	11.54%
50 - 59	Poor (D)	5	9.62%
00 - 49	Failure (E)	1	1.92%

N=52

The EFL students' writing ability showed that 16 students (30.77%) were excellent categorized, 24 students (46.15%) were good, 6 students (11.54%) were fair, 5 students (9.62%) poor, and 1 student (1.92%) was failure.

Additionally, the table 3 showed the Indonesian EFL students' writing ability of comparison and contrast essay for each writing aspects, as shown below:

**Table 3: EFL students' ability for each writing aspect**

Aspects of Writing	Scores of EFL Students' Writing		
	Sum	Mean	Ability (%)
Content (30)	1181	22.71	75.70
Organization (20)	826	15.88	79.40
Vocabulary (20)	900	17.31	86.55
Grammar (25)	967	18.6	74.40
Mechanics (5)	173	3.33	66.60

Table 3 demonstrated that the EFL students' writing ability of comparison and contrast essay for each dimension of writing skill was closed-similar about 70% (such as; content, organization, and grammar) in good categorization; except vocabulary was excellent categorized and mechanics was fair categorized. In short, the Indonesian EFL students' comparison and contrast writing ability was categorized satisfactory. However, the problems in composing the comparison and contrast essay were also encountered by them, as presented in the next section.

## 2. EFL Students' Problems in Writing Comparison and Contrast Essay

To know the EFL students' problems in producing the essay of comparison and contrast, the data gained through analyzing their results of essay writing, open-ended questionnaire and interview transcript. Similarly, the analysis was focused on the writing aspects. They were content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

In line with the Indonesian EFL students' essay writing ability, their writing problems could be also seen and presented below:

**Table 4: EFL students' writing problems**

Aspects of Writing	EFL Students' Writing	
	Ability (%)	Problem (%)
Content (30)	75.70	24.30
Organization (20)	79.40	20.60
Vocabulary (20)	86.55	13.45
Grammar (25)	74.40	25.60
Mechanics (5)	66.60	33.40

Table 4 showed that the biggest problem faced by EFL students in writing comparison and contrast essay based on their essay composition result, was mechanics (33.40%), then it followed by grammar with 25.60%, which almost similar with content (24.30%) and organization (20.60%). The lowest problem was vocabulary (13.45%). From the EFL students' writing, it found that the mechanics errors were related to the errors of using punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. The problem of grammar, such as errors of using subject-verb agreement, tense, pronoun, auxiliary verb, word order, plural form, -s/-es and -ed forms dominated on their essay writing. In the aspect of content, the errors were related to the content itself, irrelevant idea with the topic, limited and undeveloped idea, and sometime the idea was unknowledgeable. In the aspect of organization, the sentences were not well-ordered and organized, lack of using transition signals, the ideas were loosely and inconsistently composed based on the essay structures, topic sentence for each body paragraph was not stated, limited development of supporting ideas, and repetition ideas/words in the concluding paragraph. Finally, the vocabulary aspect was mostly error of words choice.

The findings on the EFL students' essay writing above, the researchers crosschecked and triangulated to their open-ended questionnaire and interview transcript results as shown below.

In the mechanics problem, their responses are:

1. *I do not understand how to use mechanics correctly in essay writing. Secondly, I confuse to locate the correct punctuation marks in my writing composition.*
2. *I got problem in spelling when hand-writing took place in the classroom, so that I prefer to use computer or laptop.*

3. *It is still confusing for me to write correct capitalization.*

Next, the aspect of grammar problem, they stated:

1. *I have problems in using pronouns and prepositions.*
2. *I have limited knowledge of grammar on how to use suitable tenses in writing comparison and contrast essay. It sometimes make me so confuse whether to use simple present, past, future, or perfect tenses.*

Further, in the aspect of content, they contend that:

1. *I feel difficult to get, develop, and relate ideas about similarities and dissimilarities of two objects.*
2. *I confuse to write ideas in thesis statement that contained comparison and contrast points.*
3. *I have understood the structures of comparison and contrast essay, but my difficulties are related to developing ideas based on each structure of essay.*

Furthermore, in the aspect of organization, the data as follows:

1. *My problem is composing the sentences organization. I do not have basic knowledge on how to write good English sentences.*
2. *I do not understand to write comparison and contrast essay.*
3. *I understood how to organize the comparison and contrast essay, but it is difficult to compose thesis statement on the body paragraph.*
4. *I do not have sufficient transition words to make my writing coherence.*

Finally, the data of the problem in the vocabulary aspect as follows:

1. *Honestly, I still have lack of English vocabulary. I always forget what I have known and memorized when writing took place.*
2. *I confuse when using or selecting suitable words based on context in my writing because one word in Indonesia has several meanings in English.*

In short, the Indonesian EFL students have problems in organizing the essay of comparison and contrast. Their problems related to the aspects of writing, covering content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

### **3. EFL Students' Reasons in Experiencing the Writing Problems of Comparison and Contrast Essay**

To identify EFL students' reasons why they experienced the problems of comparison and contrast essay writing, the data took from open-ended questionnaire and interview transcript results as displayed below.

In the mechanics problem, the EFL students said:

1. *I do not focus to recheck my mechanics because my concern is located on getting ideas and organizing them in well structure of essay organization.*
2. *I confuse and have limited knowledge in punctuation and capitalization in English version, and my writing is dominated by spelling errors. I do not have time to check my writing when writing test took place.*
3. *I have never got corrective feedback from my previous writing lecturer in evaluating my writing, especially mechanics aspect.*

In the grammar aspect, the EFL students had the following reasons:

1. *I do not understand when studying grammar, so it is difficult for me to use the suitable grammar in my comparison and contrast essay.*
2. *Grammar is the most difficult aspect to be studied in English language. The condition is that there are many students in the grammar classroom. It is so crowded and not effective, so my grammar knowledge is low and it is affected on my essay writing.*

In the content aspect, the EFL students' reasons were:

1. *When writing, my ideas are suddenly stuck. It may be caused by lack of writing practice, so it is difficult to get and develop my thoughts. I always so worried about writing when my lecturer asks to write in the short time and I am worried about my ideas are not relevant to assigned topic of showing similarities and differences which I compared.*
2. *My problems are getting and developing ideas. I do not know to how get and develop them because I do not have any strategy or technique to develop my comparison and contrast essay writing even my lecturer have taught me, but I feel there is no strategy that is appropriate and understandable. Maybe, it is because I dislike writing course.*
3. *I do not have motivation in writing. For me, writing is the most difficult subject. It is hard to translate my thought into written text and I am lazy to think the comparison in writing.*

Finally, in the aspect of vocabulary, the EFL students contend their reasons as follows:

1. *I have limited vocabulary, so it is hard for me to translate and develop my ideas in writing especially comparison and contrast essay, where it needs many vocabulary to show similarities and dissimilarities.*
2. *My lecturer always tell me that I should avoid words repetition in my writing, but the repetition always exist in my writing because I do not have enough vocabulary.*
3. *I always feel anxious in writing, so when writing, my memorized words are suddenly lost on my brain.*

In conclusion, the EFL students' reasons in encountering the problems of writing comparison and contrast essay can be identified into two. The first is the limitation knowledge in the aspects of writing such as content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics. The second point is about personal reasons, including lack of writing practice, writing dislike, anxiety in writing, negative perception in writing, low motivation in writing, limited time given in writing, and the teaching process of writing employed by their lecturers.

## **E. Discussion**

In this section, the research findings; EFL students' writing ability, problems, and reasons why they encountered the writing problems of comparison and contrast essay, were discussed. The current study revealed that the Indonesian EFL students' ability of Islamic State Institute (IAIN) Samarinda in writing comparison and contrast essay is

categorized in good scores and followed by their writing aspects ability namely content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. This findings were relevant found by Sanu (2016) and Husin & Nurbayani (2017) who studied the EFL students of IAIN Samarinda and revealed that the quality of academic paper writing was good (Husin & Nurbayani, 2017) and also their English narrative paragraph writing (Sanu, 2016). Moreover, the studies of Rasyidah & Antoni (2014), Cahyono et al. (2016), and Irwan et al. (2018), similarly reported that the Indonesian EFL students' academic essay writing ability was satisfied. However, the result of this current study was irrelevant found by the studies of Eliwarti & Maarof (2014), Wigati (2014), Nugraha (2015), Aunurrahman, Hamied & Emilia (2016), and Ariyanti & Fitriana (2017) reported that the writing ability of Indonesian university EFL students was poor quality in essay academic writing performance. Highlighting the findings of these previous studies and this current study, it could be stated that there was any improvement of the Indonesian EFL students' essay writing ability. However, some of Indonesian EFL students also experienced the problems in writing, especially comparison and contrast essay.

As shown in the research findings of this study, it can be reported that the students got problems in term of writing aspects, namely content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics. In the content problem, it is related to difficulties in exploring and developing the relevant ideas, containing the comparison of the objects; as a result, the idea of their essay is sometimes unknowledgeable. In the aspect of organization, the errors located on the sentences organization, lack of transition words, inconsistently composition of whole-to-whole, similarities-to-differences, and point-by-point structures, unstated topic sentence for each body paragraph, undeveloped supporting ideas, and repetition idea/words in the concluding paragraph of essay. Another, in the aspect of vocabulary, the students' problems are selecting the appropriate words choice and registers based on the situation and context of their essay. Meanwhile, on the grammar aspect, the students' comparison and contrast essay dominate the errors of subject-verb agreement, tenses, pronouns, auxiliary verb, plural form, -s/-es and -ed forms. Lastly, the mechanics problems are concerned on the writing errors in punctuations, capitalizations and spellings.

Concerning research findings of Indonesian EFL students' difficulties in writing comparison and contrast essay above, Rahmatunisa (2014) agreed and revealed that the Indonesian EFL learners' writing problems are classified into three; linguistics, cognitive, and psychological problems. The students also face difficulties in determining the writing topic, constructing sentence (Prastyo, 2014) and paragraph organization errors (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). As a result, a good cohesive and coherence on their essay writing are not existed since they perceived the cohesive and coherence problems (Ahmed, 2010; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; and Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). Further, the grammatical problems were also experienced by the EFL students in essay writing (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Hasan & Marzuki, 2017; and Nasser, 2019) covering plural forms, articles, verbs forms, clauses, passive voice and preposition. Furthermore, the mechanics problems of punctuation, spelling, handwriting also faced by the EFL students in their essay writing (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017 and Nasser, 2019). It is argued that these problems occurred

because of traditional methods and techniques employed by writing instructors in teaching writing (Al-Jaro et al., 2016) and lack of reading, first language transfer and low writing practice of the EFL students (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017). Indeed, these problems should be solved based on their root troubles why they undergone them.

In this study, their reasons have been identified. The Indonesian EFL students have own causes concerning why they got the identified problems in writing comparison and contrast essay. Beside their low ability in writing aspects, they also lacked of writing practice, disliked writing, low writing motivation, felt writing anxiety, negative writing perception, time limitation in conducting the writing test, and teaching writing taught by their lecturers. Basically, these facts appeared on the students' reasons because of their negative perception toward writing. Therefore, they experienced writing anxiety (Kurniashi, 2013; Huwari & Aziz, 2011; Fareed et al., 2016; and Wahyuni & Umam, 2017), in which, the factors that cause writing anxiety of Indonesian EFL students were difficulties in linguistics, worry of teachers' comments negatively, inadequate writing technique and practice, lack of topic knowledge, and time pressure (Kurniashi, 2013 and Wahyuni & Umam, 2017). Additionally, low ability and writing anxiety of students were pressured by some factors they are untrained writing instructors, ineffective teaching methods of writing, insufficient system of writing examination, lack of reading and writing practice, big classes, low motivation, and limited ideas (Fareed et al., 2016). Other than that, apprehensive in writing activities and negative attitude toward academic writing also become factors that determine EFL students' difficulties in writing (Ismail et al., 2010). This facts claimed it is obvious that writing is a difficult skill to be studied (Bailey, 2003; Fareed et al., 2016; and Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2016). Therefore, these problems need solution in order to improve EFL students' ability in writing especially in essay writing such as comparison and contrast essay.

In line to the finding solution, the writing practice of comparison and contrast essay should be needed and acted by EFL students, since writing is a productive skill that could be learned and required through doing action and practice (Langan, 2010), in some steps; prewriting, organizing, drafting, and polishing in order to obtain satisfied writing (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). They should also change their opinion concerning negative perception in writing, through extending their inner writing motivation. As a result, they would be brave, like and high motivation in writing, because it could not be ignored that motivation determines both second and foreign language learning achievement of learners, especially in writing comparison and contrast essay. Motivation also directly concerned on achieving something or goals (Harmer, 2001 and Eccless & Wigfield, 2002), and promote initiation and persistence to do the activities. The teaching of writing should be properly and effectively conducted by lecturers in order to improve the Indonesian EFL students' writing ability and to resolve their problems of comparison and contrast essay composition.

## F. Conclusion

The Indonesian EFL students' ability in writing comparison and contrast essay of State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Samarinda was in the category of good with an average score of 77.83 in the range of 70 – 80 scale, followed by their writing aspects ability; content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. However, some of them also experienced the problems of those writing aspects. Their reasons were not only having limited knowledge of writing aspects, but also they had own personal reasons, namely lack of writing practice, dislike writing, writing anxiety, negative writing perception, low writing motivation, insufficient time given in writing, and also inadequate teaching writing process taught by their lecturers.

In light of the research findings, the Indonesian EFL students are suggested to increase their comparison and contrast writing ability by writing practice continuously and encouraging their high writing motivation. Consequently, their writing ability could be improved without any writing anxiety and others writing problems. Moreover, for writing lecturers should be taught hardly and responsibly to increase the EFL students' writing ability by creating enjoyable writing classroom atmosphere. As a result, the EFL students' problems in writing comparison and contrast essay can be effectively solved.

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